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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000580

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IS](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#)  
SUBJECT: FATAH SIXTH GENERAL CONGRESS: DELAY LIKELY AS  
PREPARATIONS CONTINUE

REF: 08 JERUSALEM 1410

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (SBU) Summary: The Preparatory Committee for the Fatah Sixth General Congress is not likely to complete planning in time to stage the event April 15, according to senior Fatah sources. The venue, participation lists, and political platform all remain unresolved despite a renewed determination by President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and some senior Fatah members to hold the event. Both reformers and the "Old Guard" are scrambling to secure places for their supporters. "Grass roots" activists strongly support holding the event in the West Bank, but diaspora representatives oppose doing so. End Summary.

Congress Unlikely in April - Ambitious Agenda

2. (SBU) In separate conversations with the Consul General, PolOff, and PolSpec March 24 - 27, Fatah officials indicated that preparations for the Congress are moving ahead but the target date of April 15 set by Abu Mazen is not likely to be met. Among other issues, the Congress will select new members for the 21-member Fatah Central Committee (FCC) and 120-member Fatah Revolutionary Committee (FRC) and consider how to renew leadership legitimacy.

Fatah Reformers Push for Larger Participation

3. (C) Fatah reformers Qadora Faris, Husam Khader and Ahmad Omar voiced frustration with FCC and FRC preparatory efforts in discussions with PolOff and PolSpec. Old Guard efforts to limit participation to 1,200 and to engineer Congress membership were described by Khader as evidence of the Old Guard's resistance to reform. According to Omar, West Bank grassroots leaders meeting with Abu Mazen on March 22 demanded the number of participants be expanded to as many as 5,000, including all current and previous members of party district committees, former Fatah PLC members, and former prisoners' representatives. Abu Mazen refused, according to Omar. Faris was particularly critical of Abu Mazen's unwillingness to support reformers and predicted the movement's inability to respond to Hamas's challenge with internal reform will lead to decreasing legitimacy in the eyes of Palestinians. Faris said another election defeat will render Fatah irrelevant as a national force in Palestinian politics, and a Congress that does not endorse reformers will lead to an election defeat.

Venue Unresolved

4. (C) Fatah PLC Member Mohamed Dahlan told the Consul General March 24 that Abu Mazen seeks to stage the Congress at the newly completed Bethlehem conference center. FRC and Preparatory Committee member Ahmad Abdel Rahman told PolOff March 26 that Abu Mazen is enthusiastic about holding the conference in the West Bank. However, according to press reports Faruq Qaddumi (Abu Lutf), FCC member and Tunis-based diaspora leader, strongly opposed saying the Congress on "occupied Palestinian land" citing difficulties delegates resident in Lebanon and Syria would face returning from a Congress in the West Bank. Fatah Office of Mobilization deputy Chief and Preparatory Committee member Jamal Al Deek told PolSpec that Cairo or Amman are the most likely candidates to host the event, though neither the Egyptian nor Jordanian governments have been approached to date. In a separate conversation with the Consul General, Sa'eb Erekat indicated that Abu Mazen will ensure that Jordan and Egypt decline the Preparatory Committee's request to hold the Congress in Amman or Cairo.

15. (C) Gaza-based delegates will require the consent of Hamas to attend and return, according to Dahlan and Azzam Al Ahmad, Fatah representative at the Cairo reconciliation talks and a member of the Preparatory Committee. Al Ahmad said Fatah will seek Egyptian support in facilitating safe passage of the Gaza delegation noting that participation of Gazans and members of the diaspora is widely seen as essential to the legitimacy of the Congress. Al Ahmad said national reconciliation talks in Cairo complicate preparations for the Congress, as many senior Fatah members are leaders of both the Fatah reconciliation delegations and the Preparatory Committee, including Ahmad Qurei (Abu Ala'a), Ahmad Abdel Rahman, and Azzam Al Ahmad.

16. (C) Fatah FRC member and former FM Naser Al Qidwa told

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the Consul General March 26 that he did not expect the Congress to be held soon, despite optimism among some in Fatah. Citing organizational problems, the issue of the venue, Gaza participation, the reconciliation talks, and Abu Mazen's anticipated travel, Al Qidwa said energetic leadership would be required to overcome these issues but that he does not believe it will happen soon. Al Qidwa said that the focus to date has been on logistics, venue, and accreditation at the expense of substantive political, social, and economic platforms. Planners, he said, have not begun to address significant issues, such as Fatah's position on armed struggle. Citing his own resignation from the Preparatory Committee roughly 18 months ago in frustration over similar issues and lack of resolution, Al Qidwa characterized the current effort to organize the Congress as "the usual Palestinian noise."

Comment

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17. (C) While Fatah leaders widely recognize the need for the Congress, pessimism abounds among reformers anxious to end the cronyism and corruption associated with Fatah rule. Abu Mazen's leadership will be tested, and there is little confidence among the reformers that he will be able to stage a credible congress and introduce a new leadership team. With Hamas presenting a strong challenge, the need for credible reform within Fatah is growing more urgent. End comment.

WALLES